



# Senator Bill FINKBEINER

~ SENATE MAJORITY LEADER ~

Washington State Legislature ~ 45th Legislative District

Spring 2004



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## Standing Committees

- Education
- Rules

## Dear Neighbors:

*The 2004 Legislature has adjourned for this year. It was a short legislative session, but looking back over the last two years, I believe we made some real progress on issues important to our state.*

*This past year was also a memorable one for me as I was elected by my peers to the position of Senate Majority Leader. This was a great honor, and very humbling for me. As leader, I have endeavored to make the Senate a place where problems get solved — and not one where partisan bickering overrules common sense.*

*In the Senate, the Republican majority worked across the aisle with our Democrat colleagues to make positive changes. Every one of our major policy initiatives passed with bi-partisan support. Whether it was passing a no-new-taxes operating budget, creating a more balanced tort system or increasing investments and accountability in transportation, we have moved forward with an agenda that is built on a philosophical majority, and not a partisan one.*

*I've pulled together some of the highlights of the Legislature over the past two years. I hope you'll take a few minutes to review this and give me some feedback on how we're doing.*

*It seems like these days so many people are sacrificing so much in an effort to improve the world around them. From the men and women in the military, to our local teachers, to the volunteers at the local food bank, so many are answering the call to service that I believe better times are ahead.*

*Thank you for electing me to serve you in the Washington State Senate. Together we can make a difference.*

*Sincerely,*

*Sen. Bill Finkbeiner  
45th District*

## Inside:

- Improving the economy, creating jobs
- A no-new-taxes budget with a heart
- Improving K-12 education
- Expanding higher ed opportunities
- Environmental wins
- Protecting families against sex offenders

# Improving the economy and creating jobs

Since Republicans won the majority in the state Senate nearly two years ago, we have focused on one single-minded goal: CREATING JOBS. This single focus has helped us prioritize key policy initiatives and led to some successes:

### **Renewing key tax incentives to encourage research and development jobs in Washington:**

With 37 other states already offering tax incentives to attract high-tech research and development firms, the Legislature's first order of business was to renew several tax incentives that were scheduled to expire this year.

*"This sends a message that we appreciate our state's high-tech research and development companies — and the family-wage jobs these companies create."*

Companies that take advantage of these tax exemptions must comply with public accountability measures to make sure they are making the most of these exemptions and creating jobs in Washington.

**Investing in higher education:** While creating jobs is important, it's equally important to make sure our students are prepared to win these jobs. That's why we pumped an additional \$17 million into our higher education budget to expand enrollment in our colleges and universities — with a special emphasis on high-demand fields.

**Future goals:** Despite our best efforts, much work remains to be done. One of our top priorities was to reform our state's dysfunctional liability system to help

doctors, hospitals and other businesses get relief from out-of-control lawsuits. We also wanted to reform the workers' compensation system to build in more fairness for workers and employers. While these goals were not achieved, we started an important dialogue that lays the groundwork for the future.

### **Balancing the budget:**

#### *Fiscally responsible with a heart*

Last year, the Legislature met a \$2.8 billion budget shortfall without increasing taxes and without resorting to painful cuts to important public services for children, the elderly or people with disabilities. This year, we made minor changes to the state's two-year \$23.2 billion budget.

#### **Budget highlights:**

- Leaves adequate reserves
- Includes no new general taxes
- Slowest growing budget in state history
- Renews important high-tech R&D incentives to create jobs
- Funds 3,000 new enrollments in colleges and universities
- Doubles the funding for domestic shelters and domestic violence services — roughly \$2 million
- Increases funding for area agencies on aging to improve in-home long-term care

### **Working on the WASL:**

Over the years, both parents and students have experienced a lot of anxiety over the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Until this year, the class of 2008 was going to be the first group of students who would have been required to pass the 10th grade WASL in order to graduate. According to one state newspaper, if those requirements were in place today, only about a third of this year's high school juniors would qualify for graduation next year. What about the other two-thirds?

One of the most important accomplishments for the Legislature this session was passing HB 2195, which allows students to retake the WASL up to four times. The measure also provides alternative means

of testing for students who struggle with the WASL. Our goal is to maintain the high standards of education our students will need to compete in today's information-based markets while allowing students adequate opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.

**Special congratulations** to Mike Town of Redmond High School, one of two winners of the Amgen Award for Science Teaching Excellence. The Amgen awards honor public or private school science teachers, grades K-12, who demonstrate outstanding science teaching and have a great impact on the lives of their students.

## 2004 Legislative Report

### Expanding higher ed opportunities

With the state's higher education system continuing to strain with the "baby boom echo" and unemployed workers returning to school, the Legislature took a two-pronged approach to solving the problem.

First, we provided \$17 million in immediate funding — or roughly 3,000 new general and high-demand enrollments. Then we directed the state Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop specific recommendations to prevent this funding shortage in the future.

We also funded a number of financial aid alternatives to help students and their families afford college, including:

- \$4.5 million for State Need Grants;
- \$2 million for the Health Professional Loan Program, which will triple the size of the program and assist in the recruitment and retention of health care providers in underserved areas;

- \$2.3 million for Promise Scholarships; and
- \$60,000 for Washington Center Scholarships to allow 15 Washington college students to participate in full-time, semester-long internships in Washington, D.C.

#### *District highlights in higher education:*

- **Lake Washington Technical College:** \$4.4 million in the 2003-05 capital budget to add on and renovate its existing facilities to provide the services essential for a vocational school. This renovation will add 50,000 square feet of needed classrooms, science labs and basic skills labs.
- **Cascadia Community College/UW Bothell:** \$3.5 million is provided in the 2003-05 capital budget to provide freeway access to UW Bothell and Cascadia to expand enrollment beyond 3,000 students and to obtain building permits for campus expansion.

### Additional funding for schools:

When last year's \$2.8 billion budget shortfall forced the Legislature to temporarily suspend the two education funding initiatives, one of the unintended consequences was the impact on local levy lids. Because local levies are limited to a percentage of the total amount of funding a school district receives, many districts were unable to collect levy funds already approved by voters.

This session, I co-sponsored and the Legislature approved SB 6211, which allows 67 school districts to collect all of their most recently approved levy money. An additional 197 school districts will receive additional levy equalization funds.

#### *What does this mean to our schools districts?*

- **Lake Washington:** \$1.443 million in additional funding
- **Riverview:** \$88,000 in additional funding
- **Northshore:** \$1.344 million in additional funding

### Environmental wins

One of our biggest victories this session was overcoming the idea that creating jobs and protecting the environment have to be mutually exclusive. This session, Senate Republicans sponsored several new laws to protect the environment without jeopardizing job creation and economic development. Among them:

- E2SSB 5957 requires consistent information be used by the state to determine pollution levels of lakes, rivers, Puget Sound and other bodies of water.
- SSB 6329 allows more time to find ways for ships to safely discharge the sea water used to keep them level while loading and unloading.
- SSB 6641 protects marine habitat and wildlife by preventing hazardous substance spills.

- SHB 3141 gives energy officials consistent environmental standards to follow when siting prospective energy facilities and helps mitigate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and their impact on global warming. Washington's beautiful natural resources are some of our state's greatest assets. For too long, we have disagreed over how to balance industrial goals against environmental protections. These new laws give the state environmental agencies and businesses the tools they need to be better stewards of the state's environment.

## Promoting voter independence in the primary

This September, Washington voters will see a new primary election system. This change comes because the courts declared unconstitutional our 70-year-old blanket primary system — which allowed you to vote for any candidate you wanted regardless of political party.

Throughout the legislative session, I fought to pass the “top-two” primary proposal because I believe it most closely resembled our popular blanket primary system. Under the top-two system, you can still vote across party lines for candidates, with the top two advancing to the general election. Even though that could result in two Democrats and no Republicans on a general election ballot — or vice versa — I think this choice most closely represents the will of the people in Washington.

In the end, the Legislature approved the “top-two” primary. The bill also said that if the courts rejected the

“top-two,” we would revert to what’s called a “Montana” style primary where voters have to select a ballot of all Republicans or all Democrats in the primary but the choice is kept private.

Unfortunately, Governor Locke vetoed the “top-two” provision out of the bill and left only the Montana primary for September. The bottom line: Because of the governor’s veto, you will be forced to select a party ballot at the primary in September.

This has been a highly charged issue. I firmly believe that as elected officials, we have an obligation to protect the citizens’ privacy and preserve their right to an independent vote in the primary election.

## Special Duvall Edition: Working together to improve Duvall

In April, I joined the City of Duvall in breaking ground for your new wastewater treatment plant. It was exciting that I was able to help you win a \$4 million grant to offset the cost of this facility.

The new plant will implement technology resulting in wastewater that is discharged as Class A drinkable water. This water is suitable for irrigation, industrial and salmon recovery processes — water that is actually more pure than the water in the Snoqualmie River.

Duvall was recently recognized for having one of Washington’s 35 “Outstanding Wastewater Treatment Plants” by the Department of Ecology. By constructing the new facility with “membrane” technology, Duvall is a pioneer in environmentally friendly solutions for wastewater treatment, and will continue to set award-winning standards.



Duvall Councilmember Will Ibershof and Senator Bill Finkbeiner.  
Photo by Lisa Allen/Woodinville Weekly

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